



Solomon, T., and Steele, B. J. (2017) Micro-moves in international relations theory. *European Journal of International Relations*,
(doi:[10.1177/1354066116634442](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066116634442))

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Deposited on: 5 February 2016

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Micro-Moves in International Relations Theory

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This article posits empirical and political reasons for recent ‘micro-moves’ in several contemporary debates, and seeks to further develop them in future International Relations studies. As evidenced by growing trends in studies of practices, emotions, and the everyday, there is continuing broad dissatisfaction with grand or structural theory’s value without ‘going down’ to ‘lower levels’ of analysis where structures are enacted and contested. We suggest that empirics of the last fifteen years – including the war on terror and the Arab Spring – have pushed scholars into increasingly micropolitical positions and analytical frameworks. Drawing upon insights from Gilles Deleuze, William Connolly, and Henri Lefebvre, among others, we argue that attention to three issues – affect, space, and time – hold promise to further develop micropolitical perspectives on and in IR, particularly on issues of power, identity, and change. The article offers empirical illustrations of the analytical purchase of these concepts via discussion of the Occupy Wall Street movement and the Arab Spring uprisings.

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Every macro-theory presupposes, whether implicitly or explicitly, a micro-theory to back up its explanations

- Steven Lukes, Introduction to Emile Durkheim's *The Rules of Sociological Method*, (1982: 16)

The balance one strikes between the macro and micro is a tension that has characterized social theory since at least Durkheim's time. Whether it is titled a level-of-analysis (Singer, 1961) or agent-structure (Wendt, 1987) 'problem', International Relations (IR) has faced its own related quandaries over which level(s) should be regarded theoretical, methodological, and even normative primacy. Since Kenneth Waltz's (1959) critique of the first and second images as inadequate to capture the most important dynamics of world politics, IR has at times focused within a grand theory mode that too-often eschews the myriad of sub-system and sub-state phenomena. Attention to anarchy and its inescapable pressures on nation-states were said to offer the most reliable insights into the 'small number of big and important things' of which IR should mostly concern itself (Waltz, 1986: 329). While a recent and persuasive 2013 special issue of *European Journal of International Relations* considered whether we were at the 'End of IR theory', there continues to be a default admonition to scholars, and students, to re-embrace grand theory (Snyder, 2013; Harrison and Mitchell, 2014). A 15 December 2011 post by Professor Brian Rathbun on the popular blog 'Duck of Minerva' provides ample illustration of this move - an exaltation to all IR scholars to find the 'big' theoretical argument that will make them famous. The post asks graduate students (especially) whether the empirical studies that

seem to have permeated IR as of late ‘will make you the next Robert Keohane? Or Alex Wendt? Will we be talking about you in 20 years? I doubt it’.¹

Nevertheless, although grand theory neglected most of the life of global politics, life continued with or without it. In a field long dominated by the recurring attraction to grand theories, and one whose disciplinary trends continue to incentivize a re-focus upon global structures and systems, there are continued moves afoot not only in complementing, but in steering away from such systemic frameworks. Building upon several well-established critical traditions, a number of recent efforts have inverted Waltz’s lens of the three images. Rather than peering down on the world from the third image heights of systemic pressures, many now explore the significance of the micro, the everyday, and the quotidian of global politics. While some, as suggested in the aforementioned special issue of *European Journal of International Relations*, may lament that we are near the ‘end of IR theory’ we contend that it is only now – with increasing shifts to the micro – that academic IR has begun to (re)discover the lives and people of global politics, and to breathe life back into a field that grand theory mostly neglected.

How might we characterize or appraise these micro moves? What is a micropolitical approach to IR, and how might scholars take advantage of this and develop micropolitics going forward? To the first question, we suggest three sets of reasons for the turn to micropolitics: the *empirical* trend of interstate war’s decreasing frequency, the *political* context of the 2000s, and the *theoretical* shortcomings of grand and systemic theory. We also seek to characterize micropolitics as exemplified in (parts of) three contemporary agendas – practices, emotions,

¹ <http://duckofminerva.blogspot.com/2011/12/we-now-know-diary-of-search-committee.html>,

and the everyday. Important strands of each of these agendas emphasize key factors that escape macro-level theories yet are the very elements through which macro forces are often filtered. Whether through practice research that emphasizes the generative power of diplomatic practices (Adler and Pouliot, 2011), emotions work that explores how individual emotions become collective and political (Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014), or research on the everyday focused on the actions of ‘ordinary’ people in global politics (Dufort, 2013; Hobson and Seabrooke, 2007; Sylvester, 2013a), micropolitical lenses reveal sites that promise to re-shape how we view global politics and our place in it.

While characterization is one purpose of the paper, the second (attending to the second set of questions noted above) is more ambitious and comprises the article’s key contribution – to further develop the themes and frameworks that can be utilized to advance micropolitical shifts within IR. To this end, we develop a conceptual triad that holds promise to further new micropolitical insights in IR. Affect, space, and time, we contend, promise to not only enrich conceptual and empirical research on practices, emotions, and the everyday. Beyond these, they also hold notable potential for enhancing the field’s understanding of the intimate workings of key IR concepts of power, identity, and change. Affect here is closely related to emotion, yet emphasizes the more ephemeral and mobile aspects of emotion that operate on less-than-conscious registers. It is closer to what William James (2003: 49) called the ‘flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories’, and is more associated with ‘becoming’ and ‘intensity’ (Massumi, 2002: 7, 27) than with discrete categories of emotion on which the IR emotions literature has often focused. Space is closely related to affect, and conceptualizing space as socially produced, rather than an ‘empty’ or neutral

category, offers a view to how affective practices coincide with the production of space as socially meaningful, which in turn shapes the identities produced therein. Both are tied to the politics of time. Here we suggest that conceptualizing time as rhythm offers novel insights into the micro-political generation of broader collective identities at an embodied, everyday level. We explore these themes with illustrations from two relatively recent empirical developments, the Occupy movement, and the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011-12.

Before we proceed, a bit of conceptual brush-clearing is necessary. We have invoked and will continue to use the terms ‘systemic’ or ‘grand’ theorizing as characterizing macro-approaches to IR. The two terms are not exactly interchangeable, of course, but they are related. Systemic theorizing has been a part of IR’s lexicon and broader intellectual landscape since at least Morton Kaplan’s (1957) study, and the system as a concept was appraised through its three ‘usages’ by Jay S. Goodman (1965), in what he characterized at that time as system-as-description, system-as-explanation, and system-as-method. The second of these – system-as-explanation – focuses on ‘a particular arrangement in which the nature of the arrangement makes *it* [the system] the *major* variable to be considered in explaining the behavior of the actors in the international arena’ (1965: 258). Systemic theorizing has taken a variety of forms in IR, including neorealism and neoliberalism (Waltz, 1979; Keohane, 1984), constructivism (Wendt, 1999), world systems theory (Wallerstein, 1978), and feminism (Sjoberg, 2012).

What is ‘grand theory’, then? Largely as it has been considered in IR, grand theory has something to say on the international or global-structural level – that there is a logic or set of patterns at that ‘level of analysis’ that can be understood via particular theoretical

assumptions. Despite Chris Brown's assessment that grand theory is 'impoverished' (2013), his review of liberal, realist, English School, and constructivist works indicates that grand theory, at least up through the past decade, was still going strong. And, there are the more recent attempts to reassert grand theory, especially (although not exclusively – see Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013), in a liberal mold. Ikenberry's (2011) *Liberal Leviathan* is perhaps the primary example, where the crises of the 2000s called into question global liberal institutions but not the principles they were based on, but even more recent studies can be pointed to in this vein (Snyder, 2013; Harrison and Mitchell, 2014).

Our understanding of 'micropolitics' becomes clearer in the pages that follow, and it includes (as the following section's juxtapositions illustrate), but cannot be fully captured by, the politics of the 'small' as opposed to the 'large'. We develop micropolitics further, and following Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 239-40) see it as 'defined not by the smallness of its elements but by the nature of its "mass"'. That is, micropolitics are those features of social life that often slip through our normal schematic or binary frameworks. Sensation, resonance, movement, flow – we wish to consider these features that often form the unspoken but experiential constitution of our larger categories of nation, state, economy, security, and so on. To think through micropolitics is not to discard these categories, but is instead to engage with what escapes, overflows, and exceeds them (May, 2005: 127-8).

The paper proceeds as follows. The following section suggests three sets of reasons for the moves to micropolitics. We also further characterize and appraise micropolitics via a brief overview of the practices, emotions, and everyday literatures. We aver that such shifts to the micro offer compelling re-configurations of IR, where varied sites of global politics are located,

and the role of ‘ordinary’ people within it. The third section builds upon this work and develops micropolitics through the conceptual triad of affect, space, and time. Drawing upon insights from Gilles Deleuze, William Connolly, and Henri Lefebvre, we argue that concepts of affect, space and time can help IR scholars to unpack a variety of micropolitical insights that promise an appropriately brighter spotlighting and explanatory potential of too-often neglected sites and practices of the international.

II. Explaining, and Characterizing, Moves to Micropolitics in and of IR

How might we understand this undercurrent (if not trend) of moving to the micro in IR? Recent studies have attempted to appraise these shifts in one of the many fields drawn from in International Relations - political science. Although we may not share the initial starting point of Chakravarty (2013), namely that the micro-turn in the wider field of political science is ubiquitous, her study points to a number of reasons for the micropolitical ‘research agenda’ of political science in the last decade. The first two reasons derive from the presumed importance of micropolitical spaces – that they are (1) integral towards understanding how macropolitics gets enacted, embodied and embedded and (2) they precede or even shape macropolitical trends. Third, micropolitical research was made possible by the increasing ‘pluralism’ of the 1990s (in terms of a place for qualitative research), as well as the interdisciplinary resources and inspirations for political science scholars. Further, developments such as micro-financing and reconciliation within post-conflict societies made micropolitical research not only attractive, but required for delineating the mechanisms theorized by this new interdisciplinary turn of political science (see Autesserre 2010).

We suggest three additional reasons for the micropolitical shifts in IR specifically. The first follows the empirical assertion made by several scholars that with a marked decrease overall in interstate warfare (Pinker, 2011; Mueller, 2009), micropolitics allows us a lens on the violence that continues to grip global politics. It allows scholars to focus on the numerous processes outside of interstate war that impact individuals and groups. More broadly, such refocusing enables the *grounding* of macropolitics within micropolitical spaces. Doing so further discloses what is gained by turning our attention from war (which is infrequent) to violence (which is pervasive) in international politics (Thomas, 2011). Focusing on the infrequency of the former continues to obscure the importance and pervasiveness of the latter in global spaces.

Second, the international political experiences of the 2000s, with especially the 9/11 attacks, the US-led War-on-Terror and 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the 2008-9 global financial crisis, provide another reason for the move to micropolitics. Alexander Barder and Daniel Levine, in their study the 1990s and ostensibly critiquing that era's emerging generation of constructivist and post-structural works, juxtapose that decade with the following one:

The turn from liberal triumphalism to deepseated angst was the result not only of the terror attacks and a decade of violence, but more recently the financial and economic crises plaguing the industrialised North . . . Populations in industrialised states are more conscious of the fact that the preceding decades have *not* tamed the business cycle; have *not* ushered in a stable socio-economic condition promised in the Washington Consensus; and have *not* alleviated global poverty nor addressed the catastrophic consequences of global climate change: Western reason and moral progress can no longer be conceived as the lubricants of a perpetual motion machine leading to a specific *telos* (Barder and Levine, 2012: 603, emphases original).

We suggest that the turn towards micropolitics represents one reaction to this more dour decade of global politics. This is not to suggest that the processes of the 2000s were unique

ruptures that represent their own urgency.² Rather, our suggestion is that many of the universalist discourses of the 2000s may have led to a counter-reactive interest in both a broader ‘new materialism’ (Srnicek, Foutou, and Arghand, 2013) as well as a specific set of (albeit varied) interests in the ‘body’, emotions, and everyday practices in IR (Heck and Schlag, 2013; Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014). In this respect, Shapiro’s investigation of what he titles the ‘micropolitics of justice’ includes an ‘embodied sensibility’, one that focuses on the ‘interrelationships among law, bodies, discourse and space’ (2011: 467). Further, along with his work on the ‘new materialism’ (2013), Connolly’s articulation of micropolitics seems to have inspired the emerging research agenda of many ‘post-2nd-generation’ constructivists who have tended to focus on the processes flowing from collective emotions and violence-enabling discourses of the 2000s (see Ross, 2014).³

A third and related reason for the emergence of micropolitical analyses of IR results from the theoretical shortcomings of systemic and grand theory. The renewed call for grand theory has appeared in a number of venues, and one recent study proposed four benefits to grand theory: (1) it finds empirical utility in the ‘machinery’ of the structure of international politics; (2) provides us a ‘big picture’ view of the world; (3) it delivers a ‘novel theory’,⁴ and, perhaps most importantly, (4) ‘great controversy surround the most influential works in the

² We would thus agree with Dauphinee and Masters (2007: vii) that ‘Ascribing the violence of our current political situation to the events of September 11 and their aftermath erases the fact that many of these practices are not new’.

³ Although even this assertion should be tempered, as we note below. While some of the work of 1990s constructivists can be characterized in more macro-focused terms, others have long engaged the more societal and local contexts, including Hopf’s (2013) recent work he terms ‘common sense’ constructivism.

⁴ This in a paper that sees there being four ‘systems’ possible in international politics, one of which the author claims ‘we might call anarchy’ (552).

field ...It comes as no surprise that the field's most influential scholars are in fact grand-theorists' (Snyder, 2013: 558).⁵

Yet while grand theory 'direct(s) our attention toward certain features and properties and away from others' (Snyder, 2013: 558), it may also direct scholarly attention away from the humanity of politics. This is part of the dissatisfaction with grand theory that micropolitical analyses counter, as grand theory risks viewing humans as part of a broader movement toward some redefined and reconceptualized space – a world state (Wendt, 2003), a global democratic state (Shaw, 2000), a world polity (Boli and Thomas, 1999) or a world characterized not by anarchy or hierarchy, but negarchy (Deudney, 2007). Humans flow or are caught within this space which is being reconfigured and reordered, or are atoms within the larger institutional structures that smooth-out international politics. As Oliver Richmond notes, even well-meaning liberal grand theorists approach peace-building by focusing on 'security and institutions, rather than developing an engagement with the everyday life of citizens' (2009: 563). Temporally, the lives of humans – and their deaths – are demarcated for being part of a teleological process toward a culminating endpoint, the eschaton (see Agathangelou, Bassichis and Spira, 2008).

A promise of micropolitics, by contrast, is that it seeks out an agency for individuals and groups, rather than as means of teleological ends. As we note below, in spatial terms micropolitics inverts the relationship and even virtues of grand theory by evaluating and appraising smaller enclosures where politics is practiced as demonstrating both macro/molar-politics but also their reversibility (the possibility of something different than the broader

⁵ A recent book by two systemic democratic peace theorists puts this fourth 'benefit' front and center as a goal of their study. For them, grand theory represents a 'gauntlet being thrown down to the field, and more generally to the Western world ... Our aim in this book is to grab a large theoretical stick, rattle it vigorously around in the intellectual hornets' nest for a good long while, and see if anything happens' (Harrison and Mitchell, 2014: 24).

cultural, social, or spatial competition that defines that relationship). Temporally, by appreciating a *kairotic* moment (what Debrix, 2007: 127 titles an ‘event-as-surprise’) that may not last forever but occurred at one space and one time, micropolitics demonstrates evidence of the possible (if not likely or probable). In fact, precisely because we do not expect a micropolitical occurrence to develop into anything more than a functional arrangement where deprivation and global plight is temporarily stabilized (Kratochwil 2006: 10), it is in a turn towards micropolitics where we find more hope, modest though it may be, for human agency.

The moves we analyze and develop in the following pages build upon those provided by critical scholars for some time. Thus, we do not claim that our approach to, and call for further development of, micro-moves in IR is novel. In fact, as the following section suggests, these moves while relatively recent have been building from research perspectives and programs that provide the intellectual, analytical, philosophical, methodological, and critically normative resources to engender these moves. Certain feminist and constructivist studies have focused on the personal as political, and thus centralized local contexts for some time.

The inadequacies of systemic-structural theory have compelled IR feminists and many others to continue this critical ethos by bringing people back into view. As Sylvester (2013b: 621) recently argued, a ‘turn towards people is a turn away from depoliticized abstraction’. Further, feminists have demonstrated the import of how micro-processes can be ‘linked’ to broader ‘global’ ones that both enact and construct gender, and how the former can also serve to ‘alter’ the global at the ‘local level’ (True 2002, 8-9). Carol Cohn’s (1987) seminal study, for instance, was pathbreaking in this sense, examining the gendered discourses of nuclear security experts during the Cold War. As Jacqui True notes (2002, 9-12), and as we discuss in the next

two sections, particular feminist studies (Enloe 1989; Prugl 1999; Chin 1998; Moon 1997) have vividly engaged the everyday and discussed the importance of the body in international politics. Likewise, though we characterize some of the aforementioned constructivist work on systemic processes of anarchy making, norm constitution, and deeper formations of identity in more ‘macro’ terms, one should not overlook the constructivist work also produced in the late 1990s that focused on more societal or local contexts.⁶

Thus, a further import of micro-analyses in IR emerges – when appreciated, and precisely because they cut *across* different paradigms, perspectives, and/or approaches, micropolitics can serve to foster further collaboration or at least discourse in an IR field that ‘appears’ to be careening towards fragmentation or a lack of coherence (Vertzberger 2005; Onuf 2014).⁷ Thus, while the moves by feminists and constructivists have represented and continue to represent important uses of and through the micro, they like others mentioned so far have not been as adequately organized in this fragmenting field of IR (and thus not fully appreciated), let alone built upon in a consistent fashion. These two purposes represent the task at hand.

Micro-moves in IR Theory Considered: Practices, Emotions, and the Everyday

IR practice research follows both the ‘practice turn’ in broader social theory (Schatzki, Cetina, and Savigny, 2001), and a number of the aforementioned critical movements within IR

⁶ These would include Karin Fierke’s work on the end of the Cold War (1998), Jutta Weldes’s work on the Cuban Missile Crisis (1999), and Jennifer Milliken’s study on the Korean War (2002). However, one aspect that somewhat distinguishes these studies from the constructivist works of the late 2000s (which as we note below includes Fierke’s and Hopf’s more recent studies) that are more ‘micro’, we aver, is that they tended to focus on the power intricacies of language and discourse rather than the body, space, and time – the three avenues we posit for further developing micropolitical analysis.

⁷ In 2005, Vertzberger remarked that IR’s pluralism was careening to fragmentation and even then had ‘moved ‘toward what seems to be an increasing tribalism’ (2005: 120). Onuf mentioned in a recent interview: ‘IR has lost all coherence as a field—there is nothing left to render apart.’ (Onuf 2014).

in recent decades. Early work poststructuralist work, for example, drew upon Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' (Ashley, 1987) and concepts of discursive practices (Ashley and Walker, 1989). Simultaneously, Onuf's (1989) emphasis on 'rules' and 'deeds', Kratochwil's (1989) focus on 'practical reasoning', and later constructivist work further drawing from Bourdieu (Guzzini, 2000) all helped pave the way for practice-centered approaches by foregrounding various aspects of practical actions. In IR, this research has evolved into a few different streams, primarily associated with the work of Adler and Pouliot (Adler and Pouliot, 2011), Bigo (2011), and Bueger (2014; Bueger and Gadiner 2015). Perhaps the key claim of the practice literature is that 'it is not only who we are that drives what we do; it is also what we do that determines who we are' (Pouliot, 2010: 5). Practice entails background knowledge that actors' habitually draw upon in their behavior, and typically emphasizes the concrete 'material conditions' of such action (Bigo 2011: 233).

Practice scholars articulate their approach through an explicit critique of traditional systemic theory. For them, even if systemic theory aptly describes the pressures upon states, it is insufficiently attuned to how these pressures are filtered through concrete practices. Adler and Pouliot (2011: 6) argue that one of the main consequences of a practice approach is 'to bring those scholarly debates "down" to the ground of world politics' whereby practices produce global political effects. As Adler-Nisson and Pouliot (2014: 890) note in a study of power, 'structural perspectives in IR problematically fail to explain three relevant facets of power dynamics: how structural resources translate into actual influence; how endogenous resources may also be locally generated . . . ; and why many political outcomes significantly differ from strictly distributional determinations'. Following from such critiques, Bueger and

Gadiner (2015: 3) contend that practice research focuses on ‘concrete situations of life in which actors perform a common practice and thus maintain social orderliness’. Thus practice research tends to steer IR away from systemic frameworks that often neglect how such pressures are enacted by the individuals who, in practice, embody the state.

A notable oversight in most practice research, however, is its neglect of agents’ emotional lives.⁸ The recent burgeoning of IR emotions research follows broader concerns in the humanities and social sciences in recent years (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Much of this work follows critiques of poststructuralism’s perceived over-emphasis on language and signification (Massumi 2002). In IR, this literature argues not only that classic binaries between rationality and emotion are unsustainable (Mercer, 2010), but also that emotions are central to agents’ motives for behavior, agency, and constitution as social beings (Crawford, 2000; Hutchison and Bleiker 2014; Ross, 2014). Hutchison and Bleiker (2014: 496-7) find a distinction between macro and micro approaches to emotion, and suggest that this conceptualization offers a way forward in the key question surrounding the politics of emotion, which is how individual emotions become collective and social. While there are a number of insightful IR studies that focus on emotions at the state level (Hall, 2011; Löwenheim and Heimann, 2008), a handful of other studies aptly illustrate the role of emotions at more micro levels. Saurette (2006) illustrates how humiliation surrounding 9/11 likely influenced not only American elites but also pundit communities and the wider public. Similarly, Tuathail (2003) conceptualizes ‘9/11’ as a ‘somatic marker’ that circulated widely throughout American culture. Following 9/11 others examined trauma and memory in specific post-conflict, foreign policy, and

⁸ Bially Mattern (2011) is a notable exception.

memorializing contexts (Edkins, 2003; Fierke, 2009). Drawing upon neuroscience and microsociology, Ross (2014) pursues similar inquiries into 'circulations of affect' that drive nationalist motivations behind genocide and the production of 'others' in post-9/11 politics. Each of these offers a micro-oriented analysis which yield theoretical and empirical insights at a ground level within participants' everyday relations yet also connect to broader patterns.

It is precisely this attention to the everyday that constitutes a third recent micro-move in IR. Across a range of sub-field concerns and issues areas, there is now a crescendo of work on the everyday that has continued to draw out the ways in which the international is experienced and lived by 'ordinary' people (Guillaume, 2011), often drawing from a rich interdisciplinary literature on the everyday (Highmore, 2002). The everyday is an increasing focus in at least two key issue areas: war and security, and international political economy. Much of the recent consideration of war from an everyday perspective is indebted to feminist approaches that have long pointed attention to the gendered everyday politics of war in 'ordinary' peoples' lives (Enloe, 1989), including the everyday experiences of sex workers at military bases (Chin 1998; Moon 1997). Others contend that war is more comprehensively viewed not only as a game played by states and militaries but as a 'disruptive, lived phenomena' that is forced upon everyday lives (Dufort, 2013: 612). Barkawi (2011) contends that the field has never really studied war from the perspective of most who participate in it, and Sylvester (2013b: 671) argues that taking an everyday perspective 'means looking at social aspects of war, people and/in/as war, rather than subsuming them as causes and effects'. For others an 'embodied sociology of war' (McSorley, 2014) emphasizes war as a lived emotional and sensorial experience that remains unseen in traditional security studies. Similarly, a growing literature

on ‘vernacular’ securities examines how particular individuals and groups understand security from everyday perspectives (Jarvis and Lister, 2013; Vaughan-Williams and Stevens, 2015; see also Gillespie and O’Loughlin, 2009; Holland and Solomon, 2014).

Comparably, recent IPE research analyzes global economics not from a systemic position, but instead from an ‘everyday’ perspective. As LeBaron (2010: 891) explains, this marks ‘a significant departure from an IPE premised on the narrow ontology of states and markets, and [attempts] instead to reveal the manifold ways in which everyday actors shape their own lives, and indeed shape the global economy in its multiple spatial dimensions’. For Hobson and Seabrooke (2007: 2), this analytical shift is not meant to minimize the role of elites ‘nor to reify the agency of the “weak”, but rather to analyze the ways in which the weak affect and respond to the dominant and how in the process this interactive relationship generates change in the global economy’ (see also Acuto 2014; Davies, 2006; Widmaier, 2009). Indeed, as feminists have noted, ‘transformations in the global economy have reshaped local gender relations and women are not only victims in this process; in some cases they are empowered by it’ (True 2002, 13).

In sum, research on practices, emotions, and the everyday highlight growing concerns to move away from extant ‘grand’ frameworks towards approaches which hold much potential for seeing abstracted global systems and structures through the lenses of lived, embodied, and experiential everyday processes. In the following section, with illustrations from Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring, we propose a conceptual framework for developing micropolitical approaches to IR theory.

III: Unpacking the Micro: Affects, Spaces, Times

While IR has relatively recently begun steering toward the micro, cognate fields have made strides in pursuing micro-oriented questions. Here we take inspiration from three thinkers whose attention to micropolitics holds potential for pushing IR's micro-moves in directions it has largely yet to go. Gilles Deleuze's philosophy has been a key inspiration for many in social theory working on issues of affect, embodiment, and conceptualizing social life in terms of movement and 'becoming' in contrast to individuals and self-interests. William Connolly's work derives much from Deleuze and fosters an innovative synthesis with neuroscience to better understand the intermeshed roles of affect and culture. Henri Lefebvre's work is perhaps less well-known in IR,⁹ but it has long been a key source for scholars interested in space not as neutral or empty, but as socially and meaningfully produced. Lefebvre's work on space is closely linked to his analysis of rhythm as lived time, which implicates embodied social practices in sites where structures of the international are both reproduced and challenged.

Affects

Although the study of emotions has grown in IR in recent years, we suggest that a slight shift toward *affect* holds promise that a focus on emotion may eclipse. Bially Mattern (2014) argues that since recent advances in neuroscience demonstrate that cognition and emotion are indistinguishable in the brain, this bolsters the case for turning to the concept of affect to supplement studies of emotion. How do we conceptualize emotion – and demonstrate the explanatory work it does – if it is indistinguishable from cognition, as neuroscience now contends (Damasio, 1994)? Affect offers a potential alternative. Emotion is more than

⁹ Although see Brenner and Elden (2009).

cognitive activity in the brain. We ‘experience [ideas] in an embodied, sensual way . . . emotion is also a bodily experience that can be prior to, in excess of, and sometimes an opposing force from cognition’ (Bially Mattern, 2014: 593). We become convinced of an idea, ‘even in the face of its questionable integrity, because we are literally physiologically moved by it’ (Bially Mattern, 2014: 593). This less-than-conscious, embodied aspect – affect – ‘unleashes emotion from cognition’ (Bially Mattern, 2014: 594).¹⁰ To be clear, this is not to suggest replacing extant trajectories of emotion research in IR. Yet, taking a cue from sociologist Randall Collins (2004), a micropolitical approach may be better positioned to capture some of the more trans-individual, contagious, and ephemeral features of affect that may then generate broader collective configurations. For Collins (2004: 6), the affective energy of a particular situation may become mobile ‘as changing intensities [are] heated up or cooled down by the pressure-cooker’ of social interaction.

Much recent work on affect across the social sciences and humanities draws inspiration from Deleuze’s philosophy (Deleuze, 1988; Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; 2004) and develops the notion of affect as embodied transpersonal movements that often exceed individual subjects. Here affect relates to the body’s capacities and wider collective assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983; 2004). Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 283) argue that ‘affects are becomings’, where ‘becoming’ is contrasted with more stable identities or fixed ‘being’. Becoming ‘is experienced in a lived duration that involves the difference between two states’ (Deleuze, 1988: 49). Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 287) emphasize the capacity of bodies to form assemblages/collectives with other bodies, and to be continually affected by wider

¹⁰ For debate on the relationship between “affect” and “emotion” across a number of fields, see Leys (2011) and Wetherell (2013).

‘circulation[s] of affects’ that help to constitute the body itself. It is through such assemblages that Deleuze emphasizes the ‘encounter’ as a unit of analysis, in contrast to interests traditionally conceived or individual level-of-analyses of political psychology approaches to emotion (McDermott, 2004: 3). The encounter ‘may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed’ (Deleuze, 2004: 176). This aspect of sense is key for Deleuze, since it is often on this felt register that impressions form and ‘proto-judgments’ develop before we are consciously aware of them (Connolly, 2002: 112). For Connolly (2002: 95) this ‘suggests that affectively imbued thinking is always already under way by the time consciousness intervenes to pull it in this or that direction’ – a contention that is supported by findings in neuroscience (Damasio, 1994). Connolly (2005), for example, uses this notion of affect to develop a micropolitical analysis of resonances between evangelical Christianity and neoliberalism in contemporary American politics. For him, a focus on micropolitics spotlights what rational, discourse analysis, or single-emotions studies often neglect. The Republican party, evangelical Christianity, Fox News, corporate and legislative efforts at shrinking the public sphere, and the militarization of everyday life all resonate with one another in multiples ways to create an assemblage that appeals to different constituencies often before conscious sense-making is engaged (Connolly, 2005: 873). These tactics apply to multiple layers of subjectivity, and in this key sense micropolitics continually sets the stage for macropolitical action (Connolly, 2002: 108, 110).

Spaces

If a focus on affect suggests greater attention to the micropolitical embodied and sensorial registers of political experience, then a turn to space promises complementary

consideration of the sites of such affective possibilities and constraints. Although IR has long examined space in terms of sovereign territory and geopolitics, its conceptualization of the international in terms of an unchanging logic of anarchy (Waltz, 1979) is in many ways at odds with notions of socially produced space, as found particularly in the work of spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre. Early critiques of space in IR centered on dismantling naturalized notions of territory. Agnew (1994: 77), for example, argued that IR's assumptions of fixed territory and unchanging sovereign space, the division between foreign and domestic, and the state as prior to and as a 'container' of society were no longer tenable, given contemporary movements towards globalization. While the discipline of political geography has pursued these questions (ÓTuathail, 1996), much of IR theory remains wedded to the spatial assumptions that Agnew and others critiqued as reifications of modern distinctions of inside/outside. For example, while recent work on the spatial aspects of conflict has moved away from strictly state-centric analyses towards subnational and regional dynamics, it aims to match 'disaggregated data to appropriate geo-statistical methods to describe and test general theories about conflict on the local level' (Raleigh, Witmer, and O'Loughlin, 2010; see also Starr, 2013). Although insightful in scrutinizing causal patterns of cross-case co-variation across space, such work misses constitutive understandings of how spaces become meaningful to agents on an experiential level. This matters both conceptually and empirically, since it is often at everyday or micro levels that participants develop particular understandings and affective attachments to place, identities, memories, and nations.

A micropolitical approach suggests recognizing social spaces as sites of political significance in terms of meaning-making through embodied experience. As Kohn (2003: 3)

argues, 'shared places help forge communities by enabling and constraining the way in which people come together'. Architectural and physical spaces are not merely material entities, but serve to create shared, embodied, and political orientations which shape patterns of life and work and thus facilitate the production of boundaries between people (Kohn, 2003: 4). The experiential aspects of space resonate with the micro-registers that Deleuze and Connolly emphasize, and are characterized by the 'precognitive impact of things such as greeting, focus, tone, posture, and inflection. Space is one of the ways in which the body perceives power relations' (Kohn, 2003: 5), as feminist scholar Jill Steans (2010a, 75) also notes regarding the 'body politics' of gender which involves the 'micro-politics' of personal life (see also Steans 2010b). In this sense, space is closely linked to affect. Recent work in geography, for example, emphasizes the churning affective politics and performances that are both 'contained in' and constitute the meanings of urban spaces. Thrift (2004: 57) takes the 'politics of affect as not just incidental but central to the life of cities, given that cities are thought of as inhuman or transhuman entities, and that politics is understood as a process of community without unity'.

Lefebvre (1991: 33) offers a helpful conceptualization of the social production of spaces that attends to three aspects of the process. 'Spatial practice' refers to the material location where particular efforts are concentrated – work, production, leisure, etc. In contrast, 'representations of space' denote how spaces are represented discursively in maps, schematics, blueprints, and pictures, constructing it as a particular type of space for particular activities while marginalizing alternative understandings. 'Representational spaces', in turn, connote the manners in which spaces come to have symbolic meanings, in terms of divinity, state power, gender relations, etc. This relational process helps to draw together the materiality of spaces

while simultaneously emphasizing that they are always social constructs that are enveloped within symbolic practices. Extending Lefebvre, and discussed below, this opens the door to a micropolitics of space as not only the material locus of human activity but as affectively imbued and meaningfully produced through practices.

Times

The production of space is intimately tied to the politics of time. Although attention to time in IR has recently grown (Hom and Steele, 2010; Hutchings, 2008, Solomon, 2014), little of this work focuses on the micro-oriented, everyday aspects of lived time and how they are enveloped in (re)producing or contesting structures of power in the international. However, we suggest time is a key aspect of micropolitics, and that it ‘can be a useful tool with which to explore the everyday temporal structures and processes that (re)produce connections between individuals and the social’ (Edensor, 2010: 2). For Lefebvre, social constructions of time and space are largely inseparable, and the notion of rhythm – or lived, embodied time – can open such an analysis. Rhythm, for Lefebvre, enters into related issues of repetition and becoming – rhythm is not only the repetition of the same, but also the emergence of difference within that repetition, as each human performance differs in nuanced ways that gradually unfold new practices and understandings. ‘When it concerns the everyday, rites, ceremonies, fêtes, rules and laws, there is always something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitive: difference’ (Lefebvre, 2013: 16). The micropolitics of the body’s affective encounters are often facilitated through the overlapping and frequently contradictory rhythms of modern life. While much of Lefebvre’s attention focuses on the disjunctures between the body’s biological cycles and modern capitalism’s demand for contrasting rhythms (Lefebvre

2013), the notion of rhythm may be elaborated as a useful opening to understand the power of public performances. In this vein, Hom's (2010) study situates the beginning of the transformation from Church to secular authority in the micropolitical space of the town square, where clocks were situated across from Church belfries, 'offering denizens new sources of daily order' (2010: 1156). The rhythms of the everyday space of the 'town square' combined with this new source of order. By 'wresting the right to mark time from the Church, the mechanised calculation of city time contributed to the overall rationalisation of social and business activities that helped carve out an urban niche in the emerging modern social order' (2010: 1156). Although Hom is concerned with a macropolitical fissure (a transformation of religious to secular authority over centuries), the mechanics and processes that helped bring this about are also micropolitical.

Collins (2004) is helpful in drawing out the affective and embodied aspects of rhythm in collective events. For Collins, occasions such as public protests are rich affective spaces where rhythms pulse through assemblages of bodies. Such 'interaction rituals' are contexts 'in which participants develop a mutual focus of attention and become entrained in each other's bodily micro-rhythms and emotions' (Collins, 2004: 47). What Collins (2004: 77) terms 'rhythmic entrainment' occurs when participants in public rituals become caught up in flows of interactions and bring their rhythms and dispositions into a loose synchronization with those around them. This interaction occurs largely on a non-conscious, bodily register and is a process through which emotions contagiously spread and transform. Such lived temporal practices produce broader movements that ripple outwards, and draw links to more macro

levels of traditional concern. We may ‘use the flow of emotions across situations as the crucial item in the micro-to-micro linkage that concatenates into macro patterns’ (Collins, 2004: 105).

Micropolitical Possibilities

We contend that these mutually interwoven factors of affect, space, and time/rhythm hold promise for catalyzing micropolitical studies in IR in fruitful directions. Some of this promise lies in the motivations discussed above regarding critiques of large-scale structural theories. Exploring the micro-level processes by which broader structures are filtered provides a necessary complement to more comprehensively understanding structural effects. This conceptual schema of affect, space, and time/rhythm provide us clues as to what themes we may focus on when examining micropolitical formations.

What exactly distinguishes micropolitical candidate situations or processes from other environments? We have some suggestions from existing studies. In a series of sketches invoking micropolitics in IR, Steele (2011; 2014) articulates through the metaphorical phrase ‘acupunctural formations’. These ‘formations are spontaneous, and, like the medical treatment used as its metaphor, heal (but never ‘cure’) (Steele 2011, 27). Focusing on these empirical sites ‘does not ignore the macro-forces which produce common problems, but it also doesn’t seek to formulate counter-macro arrangements either’ (Steele, 2011: 24). Steele engages the examples of peace camps (2011) and the projects of Heifer International (2014a). Fierke’s (2013) study well demonstrates the ways in which political self-sacrifice takes place at the site of the individual body, but the effects of which flow outward to broader settings: society, state, and an international context. In his aforementioned work, Connolly (2002) advises the analyst to observe those spaces ‘around the dinner table, the church, the movie theater, the union hall,

the TV sitcom and talk show, the film, the classroom, and the local meeting'. This is a politics of the 'ordinary' or seemingly mundane, where 'habits, dispositions, feelings, the body, emotions, and thinking' can be considered 'potential sites of domination and resistance' (Livingston, 2012: 270). These scenes and spaces 'set the table for macro-policy initiatives in these domains by rendering large segments of the public receptive or unreceptive to them' (Connolly, 2002).

Here, we assert that situations where one observes the combination or intersection of affect, space, and time present an opportunity for rendering that situation or process in micropolitical terms, not only examining these particular themes while in-play, but how they might be traced and politically influence or transform settings outside of the initial inquiry's scope. For now, we would suggest, following Deleuze and Guattari, that micropolitical analysis requires at least two moves by the scholar. First, one must identify that which has been missed or lost by the macropolitical analysis, and defend why this 'mass' that has eluded our conceptual focus so far is worthy of investigation. Second, the analyst needs to ontologize the micropolitical formation, demarcating the scope conditions (affective, spatial and temporal) of that entity being examined. These two steps set the stage for an engagement of the micropolitical, with a conclusion following this engagement for what value is added by its analysis. This value may indeed be at-odds with the typical value assigned to social scientific inquiry – rather than generalization and parsimony, the contribution may be in providing a more complex and frenzied representation of politics, one that discloses struggle and risk as much as inevitability.

A contribution here of micropolitical analysis is that it can disclose micro-relations key for macropolitical events. Political movements such as Occupy Wall Street vividly illustrate the

power of how tightly interwoven micropolitics of space, affect, bodies, and discourse fuse to generate collective power and forms of resistance to dominant social arrangements. Much of the extant work on the Occupy movement rightly focuses on the role of communications technology and social media, particularly in explaining how crowd organization was produced without recognizable leaders (Bennett, Segerberg, and Walker, 2014), and how its global spread often depended on links with local networks (Uitermark and Nicholls, 2012).

We complement such insights with a focus on the intersecting movements of affect, space, and time/rhythm, and suggest that these experiential dimensions were key in the micropolitical generation of broader political resonances. Deploying Deleuze and Guattari's (1987: 287) notion of 'circulation[s] of affects', the significance of intersubjective and transpersonal affective experience becomes apparent. The encounter of bodies within a particular space helps to facilitate collective affective practices beyond individual and subjective emotions. Protevi (2011) argues that in such contexts affect is "in the air," something like the mood of a party, which is not the mere aggregate of the subjective states of the party-goers. In this sense, affect is not emergent from pre-existing subjectivities; emotional subjectivities are crystallizations or residues of a collective affect'. The 'human microphone' that developed during Occupy offers a vivid example of the overlapping affective, spatial, and rhythmic practices that reverberated more broadly. New York City authorities enforced a law banning megaphones without a permit, and participants resorted to an oral strategy whereby those closest to a speaker would repeat their words for others to hear. While slow, this practice seemed to strengthen participants' affective investment in the cause. As *Nation* reporter Richard Kim (2011) noted, the 'overall effect can be hypnotic, comic, or exhilarating – often all

at once . . . it's hard to be a downer over the human mic when your words are enthusiastically shouted back at you by hundreds of fellow occupiers'. The affective circulations in the crowd are amplified by the rhythms through which the discourse is repeated. 'There is something inherently pluralistic about the human mic', writes Kim (2011); 'it exudes solidarity over ego'. The paralinguistic aspects of discourse also take on particular resonance. The rhythms of speech necessary for such communication (usually short phrases) help to performatively constitute collective identity. 'Speakers using the peoples' microphone often spontaneously adopt a certain slightly mannered way of speaking: a strict and even tempo' and particular 'tonal cadences'; the loose identity of the 'occupation' comes into being through these rhythmic expressions (King, 2012: 240), or rhythmic entrainment, as Collins (2004) may suggest. As Protevi (2011) contends, such analysis of 'material rhythms reveals the political affect of joyous collectivity, and the inter-modal (semantic, pragmatic, affective) resonance such chanting produces' (Protevi, 2011).

Moreover, it was often particular spaces that Occupy contested to reclaim for alternative political agendas. In Lefebvre's terms, the 'normal' spatial practices associated with New York's Zuccotti Park and other global focal spaces for Occupy (such as London's St. Paul's cathedral) were temporarily re-inscribed by new 'representational spaces', that is, new symbolic meanings. A space normally associated with global finance was (re)produced as a dissenting 'occupation' through symbolic contestation to wrest perceived settled meanings away from dominant understandings. The attraction of place became more evident as celebrities, public intellectuals, and tourists visited the sites as the protests continued. For Judith Butler (2011), this power of entangled assemblages of affect, space, rhythm, and bodies

are inseparable. Challenging seemingly settled notions of place, “we see some way that bodies in their plurality lay claim to the public, find and produce the public through seizing and reconfiguring the matter of material environments; at the same time, those material environments are part of the action...” (Butler, 2011). The affective co-presence of bodies constituted a loose collective identity and helped to reconfigure prevailing discourses of economic inequality. These embodied, rhythmic, and affective practices helped to generate political resonance around terms such as ‘99%’, ‘anti-austerity’, ‘occupy’, and ‘power of the people’ such that they became common invocations at encampments and protests globally (Nayak, 2012: 250). In Ahmed’s (2004) terms, such signifiers became ‘sticky’, that is, circulations of affect reside not ‘in’ a sign or symbol, but are effects of the movements between signs. The ‘more signs circulate, the more affective they become’ (Ahmed, 2004: 45). As these signs circulated amongst bodies, encampments, cities, regions, and internationally, the more affectively resonant they became.

The micropolitics of affect, space, and time/rhythm also help to unpack novel conceptual and empirical insights regarding the Arab Spring uprisings. Most extant analyses of the Arab Spring – particularly the regional spread of the protests – focus upon the importance of political and economic grievances (Dalacoura, 2012), social media (Tufekcip and Wilson, 2012), and satellite television (Al Jazeera). Here we build upon emotion studies that help to explain individuals’ motivations and spread of the uprisings (Benksi and Langman, 2013; Pearlman, 2013). Yet, we depart from them insofar as they conceptualize emotions as individual-level characteristics (Pearlman, 2013: 389), as these do not exhaust the ways in which emotions were significant in the uprisings. We contend that emotions are not only

subjective (although some are), but that they are also *intersubjective* – arising in the interactions of individuals yet not reducible to or centered in individuals. In this sense, we suggest that intersubjective circulations of affect were part of larger assemblages of space, rhythms, and discourse that reverberated into much wider regional effects.

As Lynch (2012: 69) observes, the ‘momentum of events traveled quickly and easily across borders . . . Protesters developed a very powerful pan-Arabist outlook even as they focused their energies on domestic change’. This contagion, signified through terms such as ‘the people want the overthrow of the regime’ (Lynch, 2012: 69), often worked through social media in conjunction with embodied, affective, and rhythmic practices constituting the uprisings. The collective affect of Tahrir square, for example, was widely reported as one of the most apparent aspects of the events. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof described ‘Tahrir [as] the most exhilarating place in the world – the “giddiness” of the square was palpable to outsiders and locals alike’ (Kristof, 2011). Deleuze’s concept of affect as a lived transition between embodied states aptly captures some of the affective experiences of ‘becoming’ that many reported. ‘This is the march to freedom I’ve been waiting for all my life,’ one Cairo participant expressed (Saddique, Owen, and Gabbatt, 2011). ‘For the first time in my life’, another Egyptian reported, ‘I really count, my voice is heard. Even though I’m only one person, this is the way real democracy works’ (*The Guardian*, 2011). Facing down state police in Tahrir who retreated, others ‘knew something profound had just taken place. There was a raised collective consciousness among us. A realization . . . We drew strength, courage, and resolve from one another, from our numbers’ (Gafar, 2015: 59). New revolutionary identities

were produced through such experiences of ‘becomings’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 283) elicited through the intense circulations of affect in Tahrir’s space.

Gregory (2013) argues that this spatial co-presence of participants worked to facilitate their collective power. The emphasis on ‘physical space was clearly visible in leaflets circulating in Cairo that showed approach routes, crowd formations and tactics, to be used in public demonstrations: as one observer remarked: “you can switch off the Internet but not the streets”’ (Gregory, 2013: 238). Both governments and protestors were keenly aware of the power of controlling public spaces: this ‘reflects a strategy employed by groups struggling for social change, which attempt to reappropriate the spaces that most embody power’ (Kohn, 2003: 16). As Schwedler and King (2014: 160) stress, within public spaces ‘massive gatherings of bodies can restructure existing topographies of power and eradicate even the most entrenched symbols and practices of repression and compliance’. In Lefebvre’s terms, space played a role in how the physical dynamics of the uprisings played out, but these same spaces were also socially re-constructed not as spaces of state power, but as spaces of revolutionary dissent. Such spatial gatherings of bodies generate mobile affects that transcend individuals and contagiously spread through common embodied experiences, again aptly conceptualized by Butler (2011). ‘In wresting that power, a new space is created . . . that lays claim to existing space through the action of a new alliance, and those bodies are seized and animated by those existing spaces in the very acts by which they reclaim and resignify their meanings’ (Butler, 2011).

Lynch (2012: 68-9) remarks on the power of the demonstrations’ rhythms across countries, where on ‘an average Friday [day of prayer] in February 2011, virtually every city in

the Arab world marched to the same beat, chanting the same slogans, watching each other, and feeding off a shared energy within a shared narrative'. Rhythms across assemblies of bodies were experienced on multiple registers, and likely helped to coalesce feelings of solidarity. For example, collective chanting of 'the people want the fall of the regime' was common across Tunisia before it spread to cities in Egypt (Reuters, 2011). An Egyptian participant described the feeling of being swept up in the crowd, 'where we gathered again and began moving in an organized way. Amid the rhythms of the national anthem, we chanted and moved in straight lines, evoking Martin Luther King Jr.'s march on Washington and feeling secure and warm next to one another' (al-Abd, 2015: 79). Others described the power of rhythms in terms of the uncanny sensation of becoming intensely involved in the uprisings without fully realizing it:

Then suddenly we started chanting what Tunisians before us had demanded: 'The people demand the fall of the regime.' We had moved from simple, achievable demands to demanding the fall of the regime! I felt that the matter was becoming more serious and critical. I was confused. I had conflicting feelings of joy and pride but also puzzlement and shock. 'So what?' I said to myself. 'Do we have anything to lose? And spontaneously I started repeating the words with them as loud as I could, with all my emotion: "The people want the fall of the regime"' (Prince, 2015: 63).

Here the multiple overlapping micropolitics of affect, space, and time/rhythm intersected to produce not only shifts in individual participants' perspectives and feelings, but constituted the micro-genesis of new revolutionary identities that swelled into broader social movements – amplified via social media – that resulted in profound changes across the region.

Thus the need to recognize and unpack the affective, spatial, and temporal processes at everyday levels where dynamics of power, identity, and change often lie. As these empirical examples illustrate, it is frequently through these micro-processes where power both 'takes

hold' at everyday levels and grows from spatial assemblages of affects, bodies, and rhythms. Productive power, in Barnett and Duvall's (2005: 55) terms, can emerge from the frenetic yet interwoven relations between affects, spaces, and times. In this sense, micropolitical perspectives offer novel insights into the micro-geneses of large-scale changes in global politics that remain unseen in most macro-systemic accounts, whether realist (Gilpin, 1981), institutionalist (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010), or constructivist (Wendt, 1999). As Occupy and the Arab Spring illustrate, affective energies, and spatial struggles, and collective rhythms can reveal the fuzzy and indeterminate yet visceral and highly consequential emergence and propagation of effects that are felt far beyond their sources (even if they are not reducible to a single origin). Such factors are often 'imperceptible from the viewpoint of macropolitics' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 238). While we do not suggest that these micro moves offer solutions to all of IR's theoretical or empirical conundrums (far from it, as argued below), we do maintain that 'every politics is simultaneously a *macropolitics* and a *micropolitics*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 235, emphasis in original). IR should continue the recent steps made in these directions and develop frameworks that aid in capturing some (if never all) of the micropolitics that are often at the root of many of the field's longstanding concerns regarding power, identity, and change.

IV: Conclusion: The Limitations and Promise of Micropolitics

Micropolitics has limitations, and we note here a few concerns before re-asserting its promise in IR. Since it has been one of the major resources for articulating micropolitics, Connolly's work remains one of the most critiqued accounts. One critique is that there seems to be few concrete alternatives posited by Connolly to combat, in micropolitical settings,

dominant assemblages such as the ‘evangelical-capitalist resonance machine’ (Livingston, 2012: 282). There are references to film, but other than instilling an ‘ethos’ of micropolitical contestation the concrete examples are limited. Admittedly, this is a difficult task, for if micropolitics is more a style than a political formation it’s not clear how one ‘constructs’ or even locates these alternatives. Yet as the examples explored in section II demonstrate, such alternatives can occur in micropolitical settings.

Second, Connolly’s purpose is to see micropolitics as a tactic in a broader strategy of transformation. As he notes, such a goal needs to be chastened by more ‘interim possibilities’ mentioned above (Connolly, 2013: 40-42). The enthusiasm for micropolitics may ultimately be tempered by the realization and even likelihood for its limited ability to transform violent conditions of late modernity. Indeed, Ella Myers’s key criticism of micropolitics is that while it may serve as a therapeutic device for some individuals, it is ‘ill-equipped to nourish associative democratic politics’ (2013: 2). Micropolitics, in this sense, likely cannot *sustain* its activity through time and space.

Indeed, these limitations remain important when one moves from micropolitics as an analysis to a program of a sustained political ethos. But we close this article with the analytical-intellectual sensibility that may implicate the outlook scholars have as they pursue micropolitical analysis within IR. We maintain that while many in IR have lamented the fragmentation of the field, even to surmise that we are near the ‘End of IR theory’, the scholars discussed in their micro-foci have concerned themselves with less prosaic purposes. They nevertheless go about their work, engaging in the gritty, sometimes exhausting, task of grappling with these contexts and the global enactions, but also refractions, that occur in these

local settings. One point – one sensibility – that emerges from the program we have sketched to further develop microanalysis in IR going forward is that we should not always focus on ‘only’ those micropolitical situations that lead to systemic transformation. As Connolly also notes, such a goal of systemic transformation needs to be chastened by more ‘interim possibilities’ of contestation that may, eventually, ‘pry open’ those seams and cracks in what seemed to us to be a more robust structure of power (Connolly, 2013: 40-42). Thus, if instead we seek to locate those micropolitical formations that were achievements on their own, temporally and spatially finite though they may have been, this provide us a different, more grounded, less prosaic but also more human and agentic-centered politics. Life continues with or without grand theory, so let’s get about studying it.

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